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Becoming Quasi-Colonial Political Subjects: Garveyism and Labor Organizing in the Tennessee Valley (1921-1945)

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Becoming Quasi-Colonial Political Subjects: Garveyism and Labor Organizing in the Tennessee
Valley (1921-1945)

A Thesis Presented

By

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ABSTRACT

BECOMING QUASI COLONIAL POLITICAL SUBJECTS: GARVEYISM AND LBOR

ORGANIZING IN THE TENNESSEE VALLEY (1921-1945)

MAY 2020

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My research aims to highlight the way in which Black political mobilization in the Southeastern United States specifically is linked to the movement for decolonization throughout Africa and the Caribbean in this time period. This project will include an examination of the thoughts and writings of many of the aforementioned key figures of the Pan African movement on the question of race and coloniality of Black people in the United States. I will organize this examination around the question of Black labor at this time period and the way in which it was (re) organized leading up to the Second World War leading to the “success” of development projects throughout the rural Southeast, mainly the Tennessee Valley Authority. This will lead to an analysis of the way in which Black southern communities specifically understood their positionality in connection to that of colonized subjects throughout the Black Atlantic.

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CHAPTER I

THE CONDITIONS OF THE QUASI-COLONIAL

A. Introduction

Although the struggle for Black American liberation in the period leading up to and during the Second World War is considered a distinct moment in American history, it is imperative to understand this moment in tandem with similar movements throughout the Black Atlantic. This is pivotal to the understanding of liberation struggles because it places the plight of Black Americans in a global context, which sheds light on the nature of American imperialism in the hegemonic world order. The Black population in the Southeast is central to this analysis because of the way in which the plantation economy that existed shaped their “American” identity, or the lack thereof, in mainstream American discourse. The concept of quasi-coloniality as it is outlined by W.E.B. DuBois is helpful in that it allows for an examination of the ways in which the Black American condition resembles that of a formal colony, while also accounting for the distinctions between the two conditions.

Essentially, DuBois makes the distinction between official, formal colonies of the time such as Jamaica and Ghana and pseudo or quasi colonies. These are defined by small, formally free and independent nation-states such as Liberia or Haiti as well as Black people in the United States, which DuBois refers to as a “nation within a nation (DuBois 283)”. The reference to “quasi” or not formal colonial status is key in the analysis of the Black plight in the United States because it leads to an important discussion regarding the scope of empire and racialization as a mechanism of empire. The distinction between quasi colonial small nations, nations within nations, and formally colonized territories lies in the method(s)

by which the state is colonized. Whereas the smaller nations that DuBois refers to are formally independent, sovereign states, they were subject to foreign capital, in many instances from the empires they gained independence from, in order to sustain their position as free states in the global world order. Nations within nations such as Black Americans in the United States, were formally citizens of a “free” state. However, they had limited access to the rights that were guaranteed to them as citizens of a “democracy” because of their position at the margins of the American locus of power.

In existing literature that puts Black Southern positionality in conversation with that of formally colonized Black nations, Black Americans’ proximity to empire is typically the main distinction. However, quasi coloniality challenges this distinction while recognizing the way in which quasi coloniality operates differently than formal colonization. Whereas Black Americans are formally United States citizens, the nature of this “second class” citizenship resembles a colonial relationship. Throughout *Color and Democracy* and the *World and Africa*, DuBois demonstrates the way in which disenfranchisement along with economic and social marginalization throughout the United States relegate Black Americans to the status of second-class citizens. Black Americans are then understood in a similar context as colonial subjects who are subject to the domination of the empire in which they are subsumed.

I intend to outline the concept of quasi coloniality in more depth in an attempt to demonstrate the continuities of American empire and that of other prominent European empires at the time, mainly the British. In mapping the complexity of this term, I plan to show the particular way in which it can be applied to Black southerners in the period leading up to the Second World War. This will lead to a discussion of how understanding Black Southerner in the context of quasi coloniality is significant because it shifts the way in which American empire is

conceptualized. Ultimately, this concept is fundamental to situating Black Southerners particular relationship to the American empire.

B. Quasi Coloniality as a Concept

Quasi coloniality as it is introduced by DuBois is significant in that it connects small independent states and nations within nations to formal colonies in an effort to demonstrate the commonalties that all these nations face as sites of imperial domination. This concept is essentially the foundation for a global imagination that challenges parochial views of racial domination. Instead of understanding racial domination as an unfortunate side effect of the global world order, the concept of quasi coloniality shows us that we must understand racial domination as a necessary condition of the overarching structure of global systems of domination. In his global analysis of coloniality and racial domination, DuBois offers a vision of universal history that laid the intellectual foundations for visions of a *world* government. This became clear in his involvement in the United Nations after World War II.

DuBois introduces this concept in *Color and Democracy*, published in 1945. The timing of this publication is significant because of the challenges to the world order that were happening at the time. After World War II, European empires that, many argue, the world order was centered around began to crumble leading anti-colonial intellectuals and world leaders to question the future of the global world order. They were specifically interested in the future of former formally colonized or “unfree” nations and the way in which the racialization of these nations would impact their positionality in the new global world order. DuBois offers an analysis of the intricacies of colonial domination through the framework of economic and/or labor domination.

He traces the way in which the concept of “free” states in and of itself is a function of imperial domination through an analysis of the Dumbarton Oaks treaty. He explains that “The phrase ‘free states’ as used in the Dumbarton Oaks proposals is based upon the theory that the United Nations are predominately democratic...only a few nations of the world are free in this sense. There are many states which will sit in the General Assembly without having independent power (Dubois 279).” This leads to a larger discussion of the parameters that constitute freedom, independence, and democracy in the global world order. In this discussion, DuBois insists that we understand these concepts in their relationship to power and processes of domination. This lays the foundation for his concept of quasi coloniality by demonstrating the complexity of the process of upholding and reproducing empire.

He argues that these processes take distinct forms in the context of “negroid nations” such as Ethiopia, Liberia, and the Dominican Republic among others. These nations face a pressure not only to make themselves attractive to foreign (imperial) investors, but also to refute the “deliberate and persistent propaganda” that characterizes their positionality in the global world order. DuBois states, “It has for years been the unquestioned dictum of literature and history that the inferiority of Negroes could be proved by the failure of efforts like [Smaller Black] countries to establish independent nations (DuBois 283).” He explains that the attempts that the aforementioned smaller nations made to emerge as “progressive independent nations have utterly failed.” He goes on to clarify that “this is no proof of inferiority in ability, but only one of weakness before greater and organized force (DuBois 283).”

In his discussion of Haiti specifically, Dubois points to the way in which foreign, Western capital is at the center of the process by which smaller, Black states specifically are dominated in the global world order. He explains that, “Haiti needs today only freedom from

unjustly imposed American debt and from industrial fetters laid upon her agriculture and commerce, to prove again to the world her ability and progress (DuBois 284).” He expands upon the impact of economic dependence on foreign capital by arguing, “So long as the chief business of free nations today is to tax and starve their peoples so as to pay their debts to the empire, and so long as these imperial debts don not always represent actual hire of real wealth so much as speculation, legal claims and threat of aggression, just so long world politics will be bedeviled by hunger and hate (DuBois 284).” This complicates the definition of freedom by calling into question the actual sovereignty of “free states”.

In instances of economic domination, free states are forced to “tax and starve their people” in order to repay debts incurred in order to remain “free”. DuBois argues that “freedom” for small nations under the conditions of empire is not actually feasible. According to him, “The small free nation [has] disappeared from reality. The one great ideal was empire and increasing empire (DuBois 284).” This framing suggests that the purpose of the small, “free” nations that he mentions is not to act as a sovereign state void from the chains of empire, but instead to serve as a site of exploitation and extraction in order to reproduce visions of empire that were called into question with the decolonization of Africa and the Caribbean in the period after the Second World War. It is during this discussion that DuBois transitions into describing the plight of unfree people within formally “free” nations that are at the center of empire. This is an important distinction from formally, free smaller nations because of these unfree people’s physical proximity to the nexus of power by which they are oppressed.

He begins the discussion of this population by highlighting key populations that experienced distinct marginalization at the hands of the imperial nations that they were formally understood to be “citizens” of. He explains that, “Beyond the colonies and the free nations which

are not free, is the plight of the minorities in the midst of both the great and minor nations. There are the Jews of Europe, the Negroes of the United States, the Indians of the Americas... They form often little nations within nations, who are encysted and kept from participation in the full citizenship of their native lands (DuBois 285).” Similar to his discussion of small free states, DuBois maps onto the particular role that race plays in the “nations within nations”.

He highlights the distinct relationship that American Negroes have to the empire of the United States by stating, “...despite a determined and unremitting effort to achieve freedom and citizenship, [African Americans] have not yet escaped the position of a submerged group under a system of legal caste (DuBois 285).” African Americans constitute a distinct group within the concept of quasi coloniality due to their status or lack thereof in relation to the “legal caste” that DuBois refers to. He describes that other minority populations within empires similar to the scale of the United States live in a “degree of poverty [because of their income] that makes it impossible for them to take any effective part in democratic procedure (DuBois 285).” This suggests that minority populations within imperial nations are categorized as quasi colonial based on their economic conditions. Black Americans, however, are distinct in that they are barred from the rights to which they are entitled as “citizens of a democracy” based on disparities in their economic status as well as their position in the legal caste system of the United States.

C. Black Southern Quasi Coloniality

The position of Black Southerners within the framework of quasi coloniality is unique from that of Black Americans throughout different regions of the United States because of the legacy of plantation slavery that continues to shape the racial and legal caste of the region. The legacy of slavery is the central pivot of DuBois’s argument regarding the distinction of quasi coloniality as it is discussed in the context of Black small states and nations within nation.

Another key theme in this argument is the way in which this legacy created the conditions for capital accumulation. In *The World and Africa*, DuBois explains that the period of enslavement in the United States South specifically was different from that in British and other European empires because it was “American slavery that raised capitalism to its domination in the 19th century and gave birth to the Sugar Empire and Cotton Kingdom (DuBois 218).” This marks a clear analysis of the rise of global, capitalist domination and the way in which the United States Southeast economy serves as a transnational process of governance.

This analysis puts Black Southerners at a distinct crossroads within the framework of quasi coloniality. While they are economically barred from participation in the formal market economy, this market economy in fact exists due to their subjugation, enslavement, and exploitation throughout the history of the United States. The legal caste that DuBois explains exists in an effort to reproduce said subjugation and exploitation of Black Americans in order for the capitalist itself to be reproduced. It is imperative to understand Black Southerners as a distinct case within the concept of quasi coloniality because the “democracy” that characterizes the United States partially exists as a direct result of their domination throughout American history.

DuBois’s analysis of the foundations of democracy in the West provides clear support for this argument. He traces the rise of democracy in powerful states such as the United States with the rise of global modern capitalism. He questions the “problem of poverty in the richest and most intelligent countries which leaves the majority of their peoples below the line of healthful existence (DuBois 288).” In an interrogation of poverty in wealthy nations such as the United States, he concludes that “...most modern countries are in the hands of those who control organized wealth...This power is entrenched behind barriers of legal sanction, guarded by the

best brains of the country trained as lawyers...and elected to the legislature. The retention of this power is influenced tremendously by the propaganda of newspapers and news-gathering agencies... (DuBois 288).” This leads him to an interrogation of the legitimacy of democracy in these wealthy nations, recognizing the fact that the majority of their populations do not have access to the rights that typically constitute a democratic society.

He begins this interrogation by asserting that “None of the democracies fighting for democracy today is really democratic (DuBois 288).” He then continues by discussing the particular cases throughout Europe that support this claim. He eventually points to the distinct contradiction to democracy that characterizes the United States. For DuBois, there are two key aspects of United States imperialism that make its case distinct from that of Western Europe. The first lies in “a peculiar extension of provincialism” and the second lies in the “Negro problem” (DuBois 293). He explains that, “Both of these tie in with empire and the disenfranchisement of the peoples in the world (DuBois 294).” This suggests that there are regional distinctions within the United States that create a distinct racial caste and, in turn, a distinct “Negro Problem” than in imperial nations throughout Europe.

This becomes extremely clear in a data table that follows the aforementioned quotes from *Color and Democracy* that is meant to divide the United States into groups based on historical, conventional and economic factors. The data that is presented is based off of a study on the presidential election returns of 1944. The data is separated into regions that are classified as follows: The New England States, Middle Atlantic states, The Border States, Southern former slave states, The Middle West, and The Far West (DuBois 295).¹ The distinctions in the naming

¹ The table on page 295 of *Color and Democracy* is meant to show why American democracy cannot be rational and progressive. It expands upon how the Negroes problem and the provincialism of the United States tie in with empire and disenfranchisement of a majority of peoples in the world.

and classifications of the United States regions points to a clear difference in “historical, conventional and economic factors. The fact that DuBois separated “The Border States” from “Southern former slave states” denotes the way in which the United State empire has been distinctly shaped by the period of enslavement.

The result of this data table gives leads DuBois to pose the question, “Why is it that 44,000 voters in the former slave states have power equal to 134,000 in the Middle West or 140,000 in the Middle Atlantic states?” This question leads DuBois to further discuss the distinction of the Negro problem in the American South, particularly in what he classifies as “former slave states”. This region of the United States is considered to be “the national slum area of [the] country (DuBois 296).” DuBois explains that “The race problem has been deliberately intermixed with state particularism to thwart democracy.” This consequently leaves former slave states “...a block of 134 electoral votes [that are] quadrennially delivered to one party, in defiance of law and justice (Dubois 297).”

The legal caste in Southern former slave states that DuBois outlines is the foundation of the particular type of quasi coloniality that Black Southerners experience. According to DuBois, “Such discrimination turns 130,000 Americans into second class citizens...Nothing like this has happened among other civilized peoples except in colonies and in quasi-colonies like the Union of South Africa (DuBois 297).” This indicates that DuBois is placing Black Southern Americans of former slave states into a distinct category of quasi coloniality that is, to some degree, separate from other quasi colonies such as South Africa. This framing of the United States South is helpful in attempts to parse out of the different mechanisms by which Black Southerners specifically are barred from the pillars of citizenship that United States democracy is specifically credited with ensuring.

The legal caste that DuBois describes is distinctly characterized by the intentional disenfranchisement of Blacks throughout the South as demonstrated in the data table he provides. However, this legal caste is upheld and reproduced through the distinct racialization of Southern Black people and American Black people writ large that mandates “negroes...can belong to no nation (DuBois 298).” Within this process of racialization is also their relationship to the (re)production of wealth in the United States. DuBois specifically locates industrial democracy as more important than political democracy in the organization of the United States because it is the form of democracy by which monetary wealth is created. Without industrial democracy, political democracy would not have wealth to protect the interest of in the first place.

A central aspect of industrial democracy is the organization of labor. DuBois explains that “The organization of labor is of the first importance in the state and determines its political pattern (DuBois 300).” The question of Black labor is imperative in the organization of labor, especially in southern former slave states where Black labor is essentially the very foundations of the region due to the plantation economy that it depended on. This is an explanation for the discrimination that Black people faced from labor unions in the United States. Whereas union such as the AFL and CIO are credited with protecting the rights of laborers throughout the history of the rise of industrialization throughout the United States, the question of race and the representation of Black workers was at the center of their discussions.

DuBois understands the discrimination of Blacks from these supposedly progressive labor unions as further evidence to support the argument that the freedom that other Americans were guaranteed under American democracy depended on the subjugation of Black Americans. After his discussion of African American discrimination from labor unions, he goes on to assert that this “only increases the paradox when we remember that organized labor in the United

States and Europe has seldom actively opposed imperialism or championed democracy among colonial peoples, even when this slave labor was in direct competition with their own (DuBois 300).” This works to confirm that the Negro question is at the heart of American empire. Black Southerners are even further entrenched in the concept of quasi coloniality based on their position at the center of the foundations for American capitalism of the 19th century and beyond.

D. The Deconstruction of American Exceptionalism

One of the main contributions of DuBois analysis of Black Americans as quasi colonial is the disavowal of American exceptionalism. This suggests that because the United States did not hold “formal colonies” and is therefore outside of the narrative of empire that other European states are within. This is key point in the dominant settler colonial narrative of United States history, which argues that the United States was in fact founded by British exiles that were struggling against the imperial domination of the British Crown. However, this narrative intentionally erases the massacre and subjugation of hundreds and thousands of Native American Indians that DuBois cites as, “...the most disenfranchised, landless, poverty-stricken, and illiterate and are achieving a degree of freedom only as by the death of individuality they become integrated in the blood and culture of the whites (DuBois 285). This narrative also diminishes the role of slavery in creating the conditions for modern American capitalism as the system which made the United States a formidable empire in the world system.

Quasi coloniality as a concept allows for an interrogation of why Black Americans fell outside of the conversation of populations dominated by Western empire and capitalism. DuBois essentially argues that this occurs because it serves the American settler colonial narrative that insists on the United States as a nation somehow remaining outside of the sphere of global empire. Within his analysis of the condition of Black Americans, and particularly Black

Southerners, DuBois is able to place the American empire at the center of global domination. In this analysis, he calls into question the parameters that non-Western quasi colonial states and nations within nations must remain within in order to access “freedom” as it is defined by empire.

He begins by unapologetically placing the United States in the center of colonial domination by stating that, “The so called democracies, Britain, France and the United States have become lands where back of a façade of political ‘freedom’ dictatorship helped by imperialism and under the guise of economic anarchy has had a chance to develop t such a colossal degree that it has practically committed suicide. The only remedy...in the United States is a continuance of this “freedom for industrial enterprise” and “rugged individualism” ... (DuBois 300).” This is ultimately suggesting that the foundations on which these “powerful” empires are built upon are not sustainable because of the widescale extraction that they demand. Therefore, the United States specifically depends upon the concept of individualism and “free-will” (all concepts that supposedly comprise American democracy) in order to continue the subjugation and domination of its quasi colonial (Native American and Black American, as well as Latin American/Caribbean small states) as well as formal colonial (Puerto Rico, Guam) populations in order to continue the extraction of surplus value that its empire depends upon.

This only further exacerbates the marginalization and domination of nations within the nation of the United States according to DuBois. He states that, “So long as the colonial system persists and expands, theories of race inferiority will help to continue it (DuBois 301).” This implies that in the new world order that was in the process of being proposed at this time this work was published, would not eradicate the marginalization and disparities that unfree peoples throughout the world faced throughout the 19th century. In order for a global legal system to exist

without imperial domination, there would have to be an intervention in empire as a world system of domination.

DuBois suggests that this intervention would come in the form of revolution. He explains that “Rebellion will certainly ensue...The continents which have withstood the European exploitation of the nineteenth century are for that very reason not going to remain quiescent under a new order—unless that new order has a distinct place for them which allows their progress, development and self-determination (DuBois 301).” The “new world order” that he refers to is the United Nations which was borne out of the Second World War in order to uphold international cooperation in an attempt to prevent the global decimation and polarization of people and nations throughout the world.

However, DuBois warned that if the United Nations was not prepared to meaningfully intervene to halt the spread of global empire and domination, that it would be nothing but a symbol of freedom that the majority of the world would not be able to attain. He states, “The present attitude of the United Nations is bound to invite paradox and failure (DuBois 301).” This is due to the fact that the United Nations was mainly concerned with controlling the power of European economies and empires such as the German, as to confront the rise of fascism throughout Europe. Whereas DuBois recognizes this as a main aim of the United Nations, he advises that it will be in vein if the United States is not recognized as a formidable global hegemonic power that will emerge even more powerful if entities such as the United Nations remain mainly concerned with European empires.

Although he is skeptical of the extent to which true democracy can be reached under the guise of empire, Dubois does not doubt that democracy is not something that nations should not strive to attain. He writes in favor of a vision of democracy that is not connected with a nation’s

rise to dominant power of the global scale, but in its ability to serve its *entire* population.

Whereas empires such as the United States build its foundation on the subjugation of national and global quasi and formal colonies, quasi colonies themselves are also forced to neglect the immediate needs of their people in order to rise on the global scale and make themselves more attractive, either to foreign investment or to the hegemonic narrative of the nation of which they are citizens. For DuBois, as long as this structure of global domination exists, no one will truly be free other than the elite classes that the structure is designed to protect.

He lays out the conditions under which the United States would be able to create true democracy and not continue to create the conditions for colonial domination moving forward. He advises that “If the United States really wishes to seize the leadership in the present world, it will attempt to make the beneficiaries of the new economic order not a simply a group, race or any form of oligarchy but... will try to put democracy in control of the new economy...With that program the sympathy and interest of the majority of the people of the world, particularly of the emerging darker peoples, will make the triumph of the American industrial democracy over the oligarchy technocracy of Neuropa inevitable (DuBois 301).” This indicates that in order to achieve full democracy, the United States must deviate from its foundations and place the quasi colonial at the center of its interests, rather than “the oligarchy technocracy”. However, if it fails in this pursuit, it will succumb to the status of a Neuropa or “new Europe”. This will mean that the world order of domination will not be challenged or called into question, it will instead be simply reorganized—placing the United States empire at the center of domination of formal and quasi colonies throughout the world.

One of the main calls to action that DuBois leaves the reader with is directed at Black Americans. In his analysis of the United Nations, he makes it clear that the vision for the United

Nations was borne out of a half of a century of organizing the Pan African Congress. This differed from the United Nations, however, because the call for liberation of the Black Atlantic writ large was at the center of the Congresses. Conversely, the United Nations and its predecessors (mainly League of Nations of 1919) consistently overruled the concept of racial equality as a principle for international law. Throughout the history of the Pan African Congress, Black Americans were initially an essential demographic. DuBois states that in many of the Pan African Congresses that he called, African Americans expressed interest in the concept and/or attended.

However, he cites that American Black people face a unique crossroads as a unique set of quasi colonial people in the time in which he writes. They can choose to continue fighting and organizing not only as a means of securing their own freedom, but also the freedom of unfree peoples throughout the world—mainly in Africa. Black Americans physical proximity to the United States empire leaves them two choices as far as DuBois is concerned, they “faced a curious paradox” at the end of the Second World War. According to Dubois, “equality began to be offered”, namely by the “promise” of American individualism that took rise in the post-World War II period.

African Americans could choose to accept this promise of equality, but according to DuBois, “...in return for equality, Negroes must join American business in its domination of African cheap labor and free raw materials. The educated and well-to-do Negroes were would have a better chance to make money if they would testify that Negroes were not discriminated against and join in American red-baiting (DuBois 217).” DuBois acknowledged that African Americans had this option as formal American citizens but warned that they could not achieve true freedom if they were to take this option without interrogating the intricacies of American

empire. Whereas the promise of a free market, industrialized economy that all Americans had equal access to was alluring, African Americans status as quasi colonial people was in fact what created the conditions for the United States to be able to make such a promise. Therefore, they would risk simply becoming deeper entrenched in the world system of empire by further subjugating other quasi colonial peoples in the “free” African, Caribbean, and Latin American states.

The concept of quasi coloniality helps to frame the status of American Black people in connection to that of formal colonial and other quasi colonial peoples throughout the world. It refutes the American ideals of individualism to demonstrate the ways in which subjugated people throughout the world have a shared vested interest in the eradication of empire as a global structure. The existence of empire requires a subjugated population. Therefore, African Americans, especially those in Southern former slave states, must understand the United States as an empire in order to truly recognize the totality of their domination and marginalization within the United States. DuBois denounces the narrative of the United States as outside of the realm of global empire in order to highlight the ways in which quasi colonial people throughout the world are implicated in the (re)production of the American empire.

E. Conclusion

The concept of quasi coloniality is critical for a comprehensive understanding of the totality of global empire. It is common to understand minority populations that are citizens of empires such as the United States as fundamentally different from subjects of formal colonization or small, free nations throughout the unfree world. However, quasi coloniality calls the system of empire itself into question and subsequently helps scholars to think critically about

the role of United States empire in the domination of populations that are otherwise considered completely distinct from one another.

DuBois does not refute the legal distinctions that formal coloniality entails. He recognizes the way in which formal colonies are dominated by their legal status as subjects of empire. However, he introduces quasi coloniality as a gateway into the complexity of empire. Empire cannot exist without the domination of a global majority which serves to benefit global minority. Therefore, minority populations within imperial nations or “nations within nations” as well as small (in many instances former colonies) nations are subjugated by distinct methods of domination in order (re)produce the conditions for empire to reign supreme. All three of these denotations of coloniality (formal colonies, quasi colonies-small states and nations within nations) serve a larger imperial, hegemonic project of world domination and must be understood as such.

Within the concept of quasi coloniality, DuBois specifically points to African Americans as a population that exists at the crossroads of economic dependence that smaller, quasi colonial states experience and the legal caste of the American empire that exists to reproduce their subjugation. This is exemplified in Southern former slave states, as DuBois traces the continuities between the United States rise to dominant status in the global world order and the exploitation of African American southerners. Whereas African Americans writ large are classified as a nation within a nation, DuBois shows that Southern African Americans are at the center of imperial domination and global capitalism because of the way in which Southern economic and legal marginalization is directly tied to the legacy of the Southern plantation economy.

Whereas the American empire had not yet risen to the status of global domination that it holds today, DuBois understood that it had a unique opportunity in the post war period. He vehemently denounced the United Nations, essentially arguing that it would do nothing but create the conditions for a new, possibly more powerful empire than any of the collapsing European empires. Therefore, the United States could either choose to rise to the position of global dominance with the help of the United Nations, or it could choose to deviate from the “oligarchy technocracy” that it had built for centuries and move towards a vision of true democracy that included the freedom of all formal and quasi colonial peoples.

African Americans, as the most substantial quasi colonial population with the closest physical proximity to the United States empire was also faced with a paradoxical trajectory as a nation within the United States. They were faced with the choice of either continuing the fight against global domination both in the United States against African Americans and throughout the globe against unfree people writ large or subscribing to the ascension of American empire to the status of a new Europe or “Neuropa”. This paradox would prove to define African American involvement in the decolonization of Africa and the Caribbean directly after the Second World War.

Ultimately, the concept of quasi coloniality serves as a framework for understanding the position of dominated subjects and citizens both inside and outside of the locus of global domination. It helps to reframe what and who is to be considered outside of this locus and specifically implicates the United States as a perpetuator of imperial dominance. This directly challenged the narrative of American exceptionalism that in fact helped the United States rise to the status of global domination that it has. In pointing to the United States as an empire, DuBois is able to construct the framework of quasi coloniality to demonstrate the totality of power that

constructing an empire requires. In this framework, it becomes clear that the structure of coloniality simply does not disappear with the “formal” decolonization of the unfree world.

Chapter II

THE TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY AND BLACK WORKERS' POLITICAL CONCIOUSNESS

A. Introduction

The New Deal has been understood throughout history to be a beacon of progressive, liberal legislation in which the government stimulates the economy after market crashes such as the Great Depression of the 1930s. This legislation, introduced by President Roosevelt in 1933, has been credited with creating a series of relief efforts for the poor and unemployed as well as reform of financial institutions. In order to achieve relief for the poor and working class of the United States, the New Deal introduced a series of public works programs that essentially restructured the layout of different regions throughout the U.S. as to make these regions more financially and industrially efficient in order to attract investment. One of these programs that was introduced was the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA).

The TVA can be understood as an agent of modernization in the general Tennessee Valley region.² This region stretches from what is now understood to be Southwest Kentucky to North Georgia, and from northeast Mississippi to the mountains of Virginia and North Carolina. This damming project intended to create a storage reservoir and hydroelectric facility along the Tennessee River in an attempt to effectively store runoff water from the River, but more

² McDonald, Michael J., and John Muldowny. 1982. *TVA and the Dispossessed: The Resettlement of Population in the Norris Dam Area*. First edition. ed. University of Tennessee Press.

importantly, to create a site of hydroelectric power generation.³ However, the TVA had material impacts on the lives of rural, upcountry⁴ Southern communities, many of whom were dispossessed in the process of constructing the damming project.

The intersections of race, gender, and class were very clear in the process of dispossessing rural communities of farming families. The dispossession of these communities led to a drastic shift in the meaning and landscape of labor in the upcountry South, which subsequently shifted the conceptualization of class itself within the region. Labor was at the center of the success of the TVA. It depended on Black labor in order for the development project to successfully introduce the main marker of development, large-scale industrial investment in the region. Before the TVA, many Black families in this region were subsistence farming on land that was either leased through the system of tenant farming or owned by the family themselves. They built mutual aid networks within their communities, which became crucial to ensuring their subsistence. However, throughout the TVA's relocation process, many of these families were relocated and dispossessed, destroying these networks and creating the perfect conditions for the subsequent industrialization of the region.

In historical literature regarding the effect of the TVA on Black Southerners, historians specifically acknowledge that the project failed to bring economic prosperity to Black populations. However, this literature seldom outlines the way in which the project in and of itself depended on the subjugation of Black laborers specifically to achieve its perceived success. I argue that the process of dispossession that was facilitated by the TVA led to a revitalized political consciousness amongst Black communities in the upcountry South. This discussion of

³ Ibid, 4.

⁴ Walker, Melissa. 2000. *All we Knew was to Farm: Rural Women in the Upcountry South, 1919-1941*. Johns Hopkins University Press. The term "upcountry" will be used to recognize the commonalities that the region shared, but discourages us from overgeneralizing about the people who lived there

the revitalization of Black political consciousness as it relates to labor will help to situate the rise of Garveyism in the Black upcountry South that followed the implementation of the TVA. It will also frame the Black Southern response to projects of development throughout the colonized world as well as the way that these projects were tied to a larger structure of imperial domination of unfree peoples

B. Relocation and Dispossession

In an examination of the relocation practices for TVA dam construction in the 1930s, the gendered and racialized nature of these processes becomes clear. This highlights the way in which this project of development as well as those to immediately follow were embedded in structures of racism and sexism in order to uphold and advance the hierarchy of power that previously existed. Throughout the introduction of the TVA into the World War II period, Black activists, workers, and intellectuals alike contested the racialized nature of this program through reports conducted and published in the NAACP sponsored Black newspaper, *The Crisis*. The New Deal was introduced as progressive legislation that was yet another manifestation of 20th century “development” projects. However, it did not address the problem of segregation and marginalization of Black communities throughout the Valley region. This in turn led to an exasperation of the segregated nature of this region, demonstrating the way in which structural racism and development projects are deeply entangled in one another.

Understanding the nature of segregation in this region is vital for a comprehensive analysis of the effects the TVA had on Black livelihood writ large in the upcountry South. Although in East Tennessee specifically, explicit racial segregation was not as pronounced as other areas in the upcountry South, there were undoubtedly barriers that upheld the racialized legal caste system. Mellissa Walker explains that Although Tennessee never formally

disenfranchised Black voters, the poll tax, actions by partisan registrars, and violence had discouraged political participation since the 1890s.”⁵ In 1919, a race riot in the city of Knoxville marked a solidification of the racial order of the region. Walker attests that this riot combined with the multitude of public lynchings and Klu Klux Klan activity that occurred in the region forced many Black families to turn inward to their own communities for survival.⁶

In *TVA and Black Americans*, Nancy Grant contends that “TVA officials attempted to solve the racial problem by developing a series of plans that projected a subordinate, segregated position for blacks, not only for the duration of the New Deal, but for the foreseeable future as well.”⁷ This becomes evident in an investigation of the practices of dispossession that were intrinsic to the success of the TVA. Initially, Black farming communities throughout the upcountry South were dependent upon mutual aid networks for survival. These communities understood farming as a way of life rather than simply a business venture prior to the introduction of the New Deal.⁸ They began suffering from economic crisis long before the “official” beginning of the Great Depression with the Stock Market crash of 1929. Contrarily, they began to experience great financial hardship with the collapse of farm prices after World War I ended in 1918.⁹

Black farm families in the Valley region were typically tenant farmers, meaning that they owned a part of the land they worked on and were able to sell the crops that they cultivated. In most contracts that Black tenant farmers signed with white landowners, the women of the Black

⁵ Ibid, 25.

⁶ Ibid,25.

⁷ Grant, Nancy. 1990. *TVA and Black Americans: Planning for the Status Quo*. Temple University Press.

⁸ Ibid, 6.

⁹ Ibid, 6.

tenant farmer family were usually expected to provide a degree of domestic services in the home of the white landowner in addition to the rent they paid for the land they were leasing¹⁰. This is emblematic of the notion of control over Black women's labor and time that is central to the organization of the rural upcountry Southern context. With the introduction of the TVA and the dispossession it created, this necessity for control was only intensified.

Black women's labor in this region is central to demonstrating the degree of white control over Black labor both before and during the implementation of the TVA. Whereas white Southerners stipulated in tenant farming contracts that Black women were required to provide them domestic work, they also believed that Black women should work as field workers alongside their family members. Walker outlines the fact that "[White landowners] used every power available to them to force black women to take wage-earning jobs. Sharecropping contracts often included requirements that each family member do fieldwork or that black women also do domestic day labor for the white landowner's wife."¹¹ Although many black farmers were apprehensive about entering the formal market economy, the disparity in the earnings of Black and white farmers forced many Black tenant farmers to work outside of the farm as well.

However, Black men found that the compensation for Black labor in the segregated work force was not sustainable. Therefore, Black women were forced to also take on jobs outside of the farm and homes of white landowners. This added workload proved to sever the mutual aid networks that were present and made Black laborers more visible to white violence that presented a material threat to their existence. White Southerners continued to create conditions that forced Black workers into the formal labor force. Walker highlights the way in which the

¹⁰ Ibid, 23.

¹¹ Ibid, 23.

insistence for white control over Black labor shaped the TVA project by stating, “Whites’ insistence that black women should perform wage work was reflected in later New Deal programs that discharged black women from WPA jobs if whites complained of a shortage of Black workers.”¹²

C. Shifts in the Organization of Labor in the Black Upcountry South

The process of dispossession and removal of Black farming communities was also a process of proletarianization of rural Black communities. As tenet farmers, many Black communities in the rural upcountry South were generally reluctant to participate heavily in the market economy because of the exposure it gave them to white control¹³. The period of 1930s was also a period in which Jim Crow segregation was solidifying, making Black communities of tenet farmers hyper visible to the violent, white gaze. In order to cope with the impending economic hardships as well as the threat of physical as well as economic and psychological violence, many Black communities relied on mutual aid networks. Black women specifically were at the center of these networks, ensuring that their communities were sustained through tactics such as labor exchanges, childcare, as well as the pooling and sharing of financial resources.

The TVA was able to be successful in part because of the displacement of upcountry Southern farmers. This process not only pushed farmers off of their land, but it also was officially supposed to entail that the dispossessed were entitled to a host of restitution initiatives. Amongst these initiatives was an education programs that aimed to teach farmers to cultivate land amidst the dam and also lead to an industrialization of agriculture. The Reservoir Family Removal Section of the TVA was responsible for coordinating the relocation of affected

¹² Ibid, 24.

¹³ Ibid, 24.

families. This group of educated white men from the surrounding areas were given the liberty to make their decisions as to which families were to be relocated based on their assumptions of which relocation plan was appropriate for certain families based on their race and/or class.¹⁴

In this decision-making process, the relocation officials usually deemed Black families would be the first to go because they typically did not own the land they worked on and therefore had no claims to it. This subsequently meant that they did not recognize these Black farmers as a part of a community, deeming them easily displaceable. They did not, however, acknowledge the vital mutual aid networks that these communities created and were essentially dependent on for their survival as farmers and also as Black people at the margins of Jim Crow segregation. This discriminatory racial caste system combined with the shortage of land throughout the Valley in the wake of the TVA created unique hardships for Black farming families.

Whereas this racial caste persisted before the introduction of the TVA, the TVA transformed it by linking racial hierarchy to labor in a way that did not previously exist. Due to the apparent segregation that manifested in the process of displacement, many Black farmers began to understand the TVA as a project of development by which Black Americans become a necessary labor commodity.¹⁵ The way in which the segregation they experienced at the hands of the relocation workers extended to their ability, or lack thereof, to access the agricultural education programs that they understood to be one of the central benefits of the TVA to farming communities. Instead of providing them with the skills and resources to rebuild their farms elsewhere, this process of relocation entailed a proletarianization of Black farmers that forced them to work as industrial laborers in the wake of World War II. Black tenet farmers and some poorer white landowners were intentionally barred from referral to the education programs that

¹⁴ *All we Knew was to Farm...* 25.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 130.

the TVA offered because they were not seen as viable candidates for mechanized, industrial farming. Because many of these African American farmers were generally subsistence and/or general farmers, the relocation officers did not see them as competent farmers that would maximize the mechanized education program that the TVA offered¹⁶.

With the implementation of the TVA came an increase of investment in the region. Whereas the region was previously depended on agriculture as the main source of revenue, the development that the TVA brought companies that were attracted by the plethora of hydropower that damming in the region provided. This meant that companies like the Aluminum company in Alcoa were able to produce products like aluminum that depend on massive amounts of energy to produce. This region was specifically attractive to investors because along with cheap energy, they found a cheap and seemingly already organized/controlled labor force in the Black community. Therefore, another function of these relocation services was to ensure that they created an adequate labor force to accommodate the influx on investors in the region. This is yet another factor that informed the blatant racialization of the TVA's relocation procedure.

Women were specifically affected by these relocation initiatives because the mutual aid networks they created and sustained were devastated. Many were uprooted from their homes in rural East Tennessee areas surrounding the city of Knoxville and relocated to the neighboring city of Alcoa. Whereas some Black families welcomed the opportunity to move to the, then company town that was controlled by the Aluminum company, many women specifically were fearful of what this would mean for their kinship networks in their towns. The TVA workers favored relocating "promising" Black families to Alcoa because the "school facilities for the colored in Alcoa [were] superior to those in other localities."¹⁷

¹⁶ Ibid, 155.

¹⁷ Ibid, 165.

However, they did not consider the fact that many of the upwardly mobile Black families that they were relocating to Alcoa were being forced to move from being home and landowners to renters of company owned land in Alcoa. This is indicative of the diminishing autonomy that Black families were faced with during the implementation of the TVA. Black labor was controlled and heavily surveilled in order to deem which workers would be “suited” for the shift towards industrialization in the region and which were considered disposable or unworthy of the development that this project was sure to bring. This pushed many Black tenant farmers even farther to the margins and, in many cases, left them without the community that they once relied upon.

According to Walker in *All we Knew was to Farm...*, The effect of the TVA’s population removal program was to proletarianize many African American landowners and tenant farmers. This forced them to move from the rural middle class to property ownership to the status of unproprieted wage earners.¹⁸ This is emblematic of the need to control Black labor in order to advance any “development” project during this time period. Part of the idea of development and planning during the 1930s was the notion of efficiency and productivity.¹⁹ Therefore, it became essential to the success of the TVA that Black famers deviated from their tendency to shy away from the formal market economy. By creating a rural upcountry Black proletariat class, the TVA made Black people and their labor legible at a time when visibility of this nature could come with material physical as well as economic threats.

D. Revitalization of Black Political Consciousness

In an attempt to demonstrate that the TVA was engaging in fair hiring and treatment of workers, FDR established the National Recovery Administration or NRA. This organization was

¹⁸ Ibid, 164.

¹⁹ *TVA and Black Americans*, 101.

tasked with establishing codes of fair competition and minimum wages in the major industries that were investing in the region. However, despite these seemingly progressive efforts, more radical members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) argued that the New Deal, especially its TVA development scheme, “regard[ed] Negroes as a labor commodity rather than citizens.”²⁰ Because of the discrimination and exploitation of Black workers of the TVA, these NAACP officials launched investigations of the project. These investigations were meant not only to expose the racism of the TVA, but also point to the fact that this racism was intrinsically tied with projects of “development” writ large.

The main figures in the NAACP that were vocally opposed to the racism and exploitation that the TVA represented were Charles Hamilton Houston and John Davis. In their investigations of TV hiring practices and treatment of Black workers, they documented evidence of racial discrimination and concluded that the TVA was not making any significant efforts to combat these practices of discrimination despite the NRA. They published these findings in the NAACP’s periodical at the time, *The Crisis*. In an article entitled “TVA: Lily White Reconstruction”, Hamilton and Davis outlined the extent of the racial discrimination that they observed in their field study of the Tennessee Valley Region.

This article specifically highlighted the discrepancies in hiring demonstrated in the Norris Dam project located in East Tennessee. They observed that all of the families that were admitted living and work on the Norris Dam project, the model community of Norris, Tennessee, were white. Federal officials of the NRA explained that this was due to the fact that “Negroes do not fit into the program” because many of them did not have the “skills” required to work in the community. However, Hamilton and Davis pushed back in their article, explaining to the reader

²⁰ Ibid, 135.

that despite the existence of Jim Crow in the area, Norris was one of the few communities in the region where the housing patterns were typically integrated before the implementation of the dam project.

This led them to conclude that part of the “development” that the TVA brought to the Valley Region lie in the mechanisms of segregation that it introduced. Hamilton and Davis indicated that the federal team in Norris actually introduced white only neighborhood for the first time in the region through deliberate regional planning. They highlighted the function of the NRA in this process of segregation and exploitation of Black workers. Although there was technically no wage discrimination in that an unskilled Black laborer would receive the same pay as a white counterpart, Black laborers were seldom promoted or even considered for skilled labor positions, most of which were dominated by white workers. This sectoral and skill-based segregation of Black labor in the lowest paying positions the TVA had to offer meant that Black laborers writ large received less than one percent of the total TVA wages.²¹

The authors called into question the progressive nature of the TVA, explaining that the TVA officials they interviewed demonstrated a “reprehensible sophistic attitude”. Of these officials, they specifically named “so-called ‘liberal’” Chairman Arthur Morgan who insisted that the TVA was one of the most progressive pieces of legislation that had been introduced in the nation up to that point. However, the authors explain that the progressive elements that the TVA was credited with introducing in the region depended on the exploitation of “unskilled” Black labor. Planners in the Valley emphasized that one of the most central objectives of the TVA was to bring industry to the “severely underdeveloped” region. The regional planners

²¹ Hamilton Houston, “TVA: Lily White Reconstruction.”

proposed that instead of mass production in highly industrialized centers, investors could take advantage of deindustrialized industry.

The authors of the report cited that this was nothing more than a lofty hope on the part of regional planners given that the TVA could only play the role of a “catalyst” for decentralization, given that there was no plan in place for implementing the idea of decentralized industry. In reality, the “uncontrolled decentralization under [current conditions] must necessarily lead to low wage levels completely nullifying the social objectives of the TVA.”²² They further explained that instead of achieving a decentralized industry in which workers in these small industrial enclaves could supplement their earnings with agricultural work that they were already engaged in, the plan actually made it easier for companies investing in the region to exploit workers.

The project made the region attractive to investors because of the hydroelectricity, however many investing companies agreed to migrate to the region because of the perceived cheap, exploitable, predominately African American labor that was accessible. Because of the racial caste that existed in the region due to the nature of Jim Crow segregation, it was increasingly difficult for Black workers to organize as many were beginning to do in the industrial Northeast in this time period. The authors of the report insist that this combined with the surplus of the rural, agricultural Black labor in the region made it a “new utopia to the sweatshop employer” and “[did] little to encourage the hope of the working population, especially Negro workers [would benefit] by such industrialization of the Valley area.”²³ Essentially, the authors concluded that this project would only succeed in developing the business of industrialists, putting them in complete control of the wage scale and labor conditions of workers.

²² Davis, “The Plight of the Negro in the Tennessee Valley.”

²³ Ibid.

In the conclusion of their analysis of the problems facing Black workers in the area, Hamilton and Davis issue Black people throughout the world a call to action. They explain that “[The Black workers’] standard of living has not even temporally been increased. They know as well that there is joblessness in the Valley for them once the dams are through. These men are used to segregation and prejudice...They are not used to having federal funds used to extend a policy of race discrimination.”²⁴ In this excerpt, the structural nature of discrimination that the TVA employed becomes clear. The authors of this report specifically point to the distinction between this form of discrimination—the fact that is literally funded by the federal government. This leads Black workers to understand their position as not only second-class citizens in the United States, but also as a disposable source of labor that the State employs at its convenience.

Ultimately, this report calls on Black people of the world to organize in order to combat the wide scale exploitation of Black labor for the purposes of reproducing and strengthening the United States empire. They assert that, [Black people] must bring mass pressure to bear on the government to secure the employment of Negro skilled labor.... We must demand a program of socialized electrification which will enable Negro workers to have some benefits from the power program. These are immediate tasks of Negroes everywhere... [These calls to action] are a beginning. But at the same time, we must work for the organization of labor, both Negro and white, in the area as the only sure means of gaining economic existence for Valley dwellers.”²⁵ There is a universality in these calls to action that indicate to the reader that the organization of labor is the main avenue through which Black people of the Valley and of the Black Atlantic writ large will be able to achieve freedom.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

This idea becomes one of the main catalysts for the implementation of Garveyism in this region. With the introduction of the TVA and “decentralized industry” Black workers were pushed even farther to the margins of Southern society. In an attempt to organize their labor, they employed Garveyism as a framework. The adoption of Garveyism that was facilitated by the introduction of the exploitative TVA development project led many Black Southerners to understand their conditions as laborers in a similar context of those throughout the American Northeast and the Caribbean, African, and Latin American countries that were becoming subject to exploitation caused by development.²⁶ This is significant in that it provides an alternative framing for the movement towards the decolonization of Africa and the Caribbean in the post-World War II period.

E. Conclusion

I depart from the argument of scholars such as Nancy Grant who contend that the TVA was not inherently racist, however it proved to have unintended consequences in the racialized hiring practices and working conditions. I instead argue that the structure of the TVA was inherently racialized and actually depended on the subjugation, dispossession, relocation, marginalization, and exploitation of Black people in the Tennessee Valley Region. The “success” of the TVA is believed to lie in the infrastructural advancements and the attraction of industry to the region due to the production of hydroelectricity. However, the land that the on which hydroelectric dam is located was acquired through racialized processes of relocation.

In these processes, relocation officials deemed Black farmers in the area as without a community and therefore concluded they would be the first people removed from their lands. This not only severed the mutual aid networks that these Black farmers depended on for their

²⁶ *The Rise and Fall of the Garvey Movement in the Urban South, 1918-1942*, 25.

livelihood, but it also forced them into the exploitative formal market economy. Whereas the insistence on the control of Black labor was always an issue in this region, it was exacerbated by the discriminatory hiring practices and exploitative working conditions that the TVA set the conditions for. While hydroelectricity was an enticing feature of the region, many companies took advantage of the decentralized economy that the TVA created in order to control and exploit Black labor for profit.

NAACP officials like Charles Hamilton Houston and John Davis made a point to study and document the racial discrimination that the TVA implemented in its development projects in order to prove the exploitation of Black workers. In this report, the authors demonstrated the structural nature of the racist hiring and relocation practices of the TVA. In this analysis, they contend that African Americans were not only targeted by the TVA as an expendable labor force but were also barred from the “progress” and “development” that the TVA was meant to bring to the region. Beyond the discrimination in employment, the TVA also create the conditions for an introduction of housing segregation in the Norris area specifically. Previously, white and Black families in this area lived amongst each other despite the racial caste that existed. The relocation and hiring process introduced by the TVA forced them into segregated housing conditions that would prove to shape the racial makeup of the region for years to come.

Essentially, the effect that the TVA had on Black families of the Tennessee Valley Region is emblematic of the nature of development and regional planning in this time period. This case is distinct in literature surrounding development projects’ effects on marginalized communities because most of this literature highlights America development projects throughout the “developing world” abroad. In demonstrating the detrimental effects of the TVA on Black Southerners, it become clear that the process of development writ large serves the interest of

empire. This case puts Black Americans and Black Southerners specifically in the global conversation surrounding the impact of development projects throughout the world.

Chapter III

GARVEYISM, ACTIVISM, AND THE BLACK WORKING-CLASS LEFT IN THE TENNESSEE VALLEY

A. The Rise of Garveyism in the South

By 1922, Garvey had established himself as a prominent leader in both rural and urban Black communities throughout the Southeast. Whereas there were established chapters of the UNIA throughout the United States—specifically in the Northeast, Garvey understood the vitality of Southern Black support. He notes that Black Southerners represented a distinct positionality in the United States empire, that resembled the quasi coloniality that DuBois outlined much later in the 1940s. Southern “race men” such as Booker T. Washington were instrumental in Garvey’s initial understanding of organizing in Jamaica, which would eventually become the foundations of the UNIA. Along with Washington, Garvey was also influenced by Joseph Thomas Love, the associate of Bishop Henry McNeal Turner.

Bishop Turner was a pivotal and somewhat controversial figure in the Black South was understood as a “Black missionary to Africa”. Throughout his life, he traveled through Georgia specifically preaching the vitality of Black farmers specifically organizing and relocating to Africa. Garvey admittedly adopted a similar framework and was specifically inspired by Robert Love who served as a reformer in Jamaica between 1895-1905.²⁷ Before arriving in Jamaica, Love served as the head of the AME²⁸ mission in Savannah, Georgia and was a close colleague

²⁷ Rolinson, Mary G. 2007. *Grassroots Garveyism: The Universal Negro Improvement Association in the Rural South, 1920-1927* University of North Carolina Press.

²⁸ Ibid, 13.

of Bishop Turner. Love's work in Jamaica inspired Garvey as he worked to build a movement amongst poor, landless agricultural workers in Jamaica. Amy Jacques Garvey writes about Love's influence on Garvey and the way in which he modeled his approach to organizing landless poor Jamaicans based on Love's teachings.²⁹

Once Garvey learned more about the racial dynamics and regional distinctions that exist in the United States, it became clear that rural Black Southerners held a positionality similar to that of the landless, poor Jamaicans he once organized. Both the landless Jamaican farmers and Southern Black sharecroppers were "voteless, landless, and yoked to the plantation system".³⁰ The most salient similarity between the teachings of Garvey and that of Southern figures represented racial uplift was their emphasis on economic independence. With the solidification of Jim Crow segregation based on the principles of "separate by equal", it was clear to these leaders that the Southern Black community needed to create some semblance of a self-sufficient economic structure.

With the Great Depression and New Deal Era liberalism on the rise, solidarity strictly based on race was somewhat dwindling. Instead, rural Southerners specifically were more focused on the class allegiances of organizations that claimed to be serving the interests of Black communities such as the NAACP. Many urban Black Americans throughout the Northeast and Southern urban hubs were specifically hopeful of the future of the Black community in the United States based on the liberal New Deal reforms. However, throughout rural communities of Black Southerners who worked as tenant farmers, specifically in the Tennessee Valley, were left "even more alienated from the white dominated American body-politic".³¹ These groups of rural

²⁹ Ibid 20.

³⁰ Ibid 22.

³¹ Ibid 22.

Southerners specifically adopted many of the tenants of Garveyism, while their organization was undeniably distinct based on their cultural and historical context.

Whereas these workers and farmers did adopt many of the concepts that Garvey advanced, many of them also reconciled with their new positionality as members of the American proletariat. This reconciliation took many forms, including a radical one in which tenant farmers and low wage workers alike joined and/or created communist and leftist organization to protect their rights as workers. Southern founded organizations such as the Sharecropper's Union or the Southern Tenant Farmers Union did not necessarily explicitly align themselves with Garvey or the UNIA. However, Black leftists in the Tennessee Valley region specifically were unique in that the UNIA branch in areas such as Chattanooga was closely aligned with the Chattanooga Communist party.

These contradictions indicate the distinct way in which rural Black southerners specifically understood their position in relation to the teachings of Garveyism. Whereas the teachings of economic independence and racial consciousness appealed to them, there were sects of farmers and agricultural workers specifically who understood the end goal of racial liberation differently. Instead of supporting the creation of a utopic Black empire with Garvey as the emperor, they understood Garveyism as a step on a path towards racial and economic liberation and full, global citizenship.

B. The Distinct Organization

Garvey introduced himself at a period of time in the South where Black Southerners were concerned about their post-war positionality in the United States. Many rural Blacks specifically had been targeted by New Deal programs such as the Tennessee Valley Authority and were growing increasingly disgruntled with the stark economic and political disparities between white

and Black southern society. Historian Claudrena Harold cites that Garvey benefitted immensely from the “rising militancy” of Black Southerners throughout the 1920s specifically.

UNIA chapters throughout the South were spaces where community needs were met. Many UNIA chapters provided their communities with necessary services such as an employment bureau, food banks services, and adult night school. They were also spaces where black art and creativity were encouraged.³² The Great Depression and the period directly after it proved to be especially challenging to Black Southerner’s. This was a time where they were forced to understand racial oppression and its connection to economic injustice. During this time, it also became clear that the United States was not the only nation suffering, and that Black people around the Diaspora were suffering under imperial governments that sought to capitalize off of the systematic oppression of Black political subjects.

There were crucially important distinctions in the organization of Garveyism in Southeastern states specifically. One of the main differences was the material threat that Jim Crow racism posed. In the Northeast, many Black Garveyites were fighting for economic and political freedom. However, Southern Garveyites were adamant that they needed an immediate end to the reign of terror that Jim Crow segregation created. As different chapters of the UNIA began to form, white Southerners pushed back because they were afraid that the further spread of the *Negro World* and the UNIA would encourage black members to violently revolt.³³ This assumption led many UNIA chapters in cities throughout the South to be marked as targets.

³² Harold, Claudrena N. 2007. *The Rise and Fall of the Garvey Movement in the Urban South, 1918-1942*Routledge.

³³ Ibid 23.

C. Chattanooga

The city of Chattanooga was perhaps the most notable city within the Tennessee Valley to adopt the principles of Garveyism. The city had come into direct contact with the displacing policies as procedures of the Tennessee Valley Authority as it is less than forty-five minutes south of Knoxville. It can also be assumed that Chattanooga was familiar with the teachings of Garvey because he was imprisoned in Atlanta, Georgia at the time they established their chapter. Atlanta being less than an hour from Chattanooga, one can imagine the transfer of ideas between the two cities. In addition to the UNIA chapter, Chattanooga was also home to one of the most active chapters of the Communist Party in the South. They were in direct communication with the Southern Farmers Tennant Union, fighting for the rights of landowning and tenant farmers in the wake of the New Deal.

Whereas these organizations were committed to improving the lives of oppressed communities in Chattanooga and surrounding areas, local white Jim Crow supporters feared for the future of the racial order in their city. This uneasiness led to the heightened surveillance of the UNIA chapter specifically due to its ties to the Communist Party of Chattanooga. Local officials were worried about the growing support that the UNIA was getting from Black workers. As a result, the commissioner of the Chattanooga Police Department ordered a raid of the UNIA chapter during a Liberty Hall meeting. The city of Chattanooga denounced the UNIA chapter for its “violence”, because members had fired shots at the police raid to defend themselves. They were subsequently banned from gathering as an official chapter of the UNIA.

D. Conclusion

Garvey was able to galvanize Black workers throughout the South, including tenant farmers, domestic workers, and college students. Not only did he appeal to Black Southerners

born and raised under the oppressive racial politics of the American South, but also Caribbean immigrants who had settled in the south—mainly Bahamians in Southern Florida. The Garvey movement was so enticing initially because of Garvey as a figure in and of himself. Not only did Garvey work with Black people around the world, but he preached about the need to dismantle British and American imperialism in the Caribbean and in the United States and Britain in order to truly get to the root of anti-Black racism throughout the world. Even though he saw himself as the leader of an eventual black empire, many Black Southerners commended him for his ability to connect the plight of southern Black workers with others oppressed throughout the Diaspora.

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